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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, April 27, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TIPS FOR FOOD-SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the Consumers' Counsel, Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

--ooOoo--

Our usual fortnightly tips for food-shoppers are on schedule today.

Suppose I start with news of fresh spring vegetables. Spring vegetable crops are maturing several weeks earlier than usual in all sections except the Pacific Coast. And you can expect to see more lima beans, cabbage and carrots on the market this spring than last spring. But you can expect fewer Bermuda onions, somewhat fewer beets and spinach, and considerably fewer green peas. As for new-crop potatoes from the early-producing States and snap beans, the markets will have just about the same amount of these vegetables as they did last year. As you know, more and more vegetables come to market during the spring and summer and prices usually go down until they hit bottom in the summer.

The season for cantaloups, cherries and broilers opens during the last half of April, but supplies of these 3 products will be much larger in May.

The latter part of April is the time when asparagus shipments from California are largest. Because wet weather this year has slowed up harvesting, the shipping from this area may be less than a year ago. As perhaps you know, California furnishes the bulk of the early crop of asparagus.

You can expect more strawberries this May than last. The crop is maturing early this year because of favorable weather, so peak shipments may come early in May. The States that ship strawberries mostly in April and May produce about a half of our yearly supply of strawberries. Louisiana is the major strawberry-producing State. And the Farmers' Protective Union, which controls distribution of the strawberry crop in that State, has refused to sell berries to buyers who retail them at less than a cent and a half a pint above cost.

The big supplies of apples and oranges still on hand this spring have been a problem to producers and distributors. But the producers are cooperating with retail grocers in special sales in order to sell the surplus. In mid-March retail orange prices were close to the lowest on record -- a third below last year. Retail apple prices haven't changed much since they hit bottom last October. Apple prices also were a third under 1937.

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Egg prices are choapest in March and April. Prices then move up, but the sharpest upswing begins in June. Eggs have been retailing at relatively low prices and during the first quarter of this year they were lowest for this period since the year 1934. Egg production has been heavier than a year ago, but probably will drop below its 1937 level in the summer and fall.

The spring peak in hog prices appears to have been reached already. So you can expect to see prices going down through June. The total amount of pork on hand during the rest of the marketing season (which ends September 30) may not be much different from last year, but prices will probably be lower. Less pork in storage will probably offset a considerable part of the sharp increase in hog slaughter expected.

Speaking of meat, more spring lambs are coming on the market and more lambs will be killed for market before the first of July than were last year. As for prices, you can expect much lower prices for spring lamb this year than last.

Here's news about broilers. Broilers, you know, are the first young chickens which are marketed during the spring. They are mostly young cockerels and weigh from one and a half to 2 and a half pounds. Early chicken hatchings have been larger than a year ago and broiler marketings probably will be larger this year, too.

As for butter, more butter will be produced this spring and summer than last probably. The low point in butter prices for the season usually comes in June.

Because of very large supplies on hand this year, the prices of lard, cottonseed oil, and other fats and oils probably will continue lower than a year ago. In the middle of March the average retail cost of fats and oils was about an eighth less than last year.

Finally, a little news note on bread, cracker and cake prices. The average retail price of white bread has not changed since last June. The present price of bread is the highest since 1929. But during this same period the retail price of flour has dropped three-quarters of a cent a pound to the lowest level since the middle of the year 1933. And the price of soda crackers has gone down about a cent and a half a pound since last June. But the price of pound cake has shown no net change during the period.

That concludes the tips for food-shoppers for the present. But before I forget, I want to suggest a leaflet to help you make the most of eggs while they are still down in price. This is Leaflet No. 39 called "Eggs at Any Meal." As long as the free supply lasts, you are welcome to a copy if you write to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. Once again, listeners -- "Eggs at Any Meal", Leaflet No. 39.
